

REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

STUDY ONE

A Glance Back to the Future

Selections from Revelation

This book brings great encouragement to those who know Christ. It shows us that God keeps His word. In the end, God wins. The triumphant, supreme Lord is Jesus and none other. And by even the end of time, there will be no other one to whom every knee will bow and every tongue will confess.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

FOR millennia, the people of God have closely held certain beliefs that puzzle our finite human minds. We worship one God, who eternally exists in three persons. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human. God gives humans free will while remaining entirely sovereign. Yet one of the most perplexing aspects of Christian doctrine is the blend of two of God's attributes . . .

His mercy and His justice.

In essence, mercy refers to someone withholding punishment from someone who deserves it, and justice demands that everyone be held accountable, receiving equal treatment, to the same law. So how can God be merciful and just at the same time? Can a judge declare a thief both innocent and guilty? It doesn't seem to make sense.

Despite this supposed conundrum, Scripture affirms that these two qualities working in tandem make God unique. Yes, God is just, and He will hold every person accountable for his or her sins. He also is merciful, and He demonstrated that mercy through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—the spotless Lamb who knew no sin yet still became sin so that we could be called righteous.

As followers of Christ, we eagerly await the day when Jesus returns to demonstrate the fullness of His justice—to deal with evil permanently—and His mercy to free those who place their trust in Him from the ancient shackles of sin and death. In that moment, we will see God's true character on display as a perplexingly beautiful kaleidoscope of divine glory.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before you open your Bible, write a prayer in the space below. Ask God to reveal Himself to you as you study His Word. Ask for wisdom as you seek to understand His character and to respond faithfully to His justice and mercy.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Because justice acts as a load-bearing pillar in the structure of God's character, Scripture shows Him releasing cataclysmic judgments upon evil at key turning points of human history. He sent the flood. He confused languages at Babel. He showered Sodom and Gomorrah with fire. He struck Egypt with deadly plagues.

Yet God didn't reserve His justice for idolaters only. God is a *righteous* judge, and His decrees are always impartial. So, when Israel's unfaithfulness reached its full measure, He sent foreign empires to assault the promised land. He allowed pagans to desecrate and destroy the temple. He sent His chosen people into exile.

Though God's acts of judgment seem like the monstrous waves of a tsunami, the storm always slows to offer quiet intervals of mercy for those who seek it. Revelation describes the final crashing waves of God's justice—that day when He will finally destroy sin and vindicate the righteous who will enjoy calm waters for eternity.



Observation: Three Cycles of Judgment

As you read about each set of judgments in Revelation, use your observation skills to fill in the charts below by briefly summarizing each judgment.¹ Don't worry about the interpretation of each symbol or image. We'll explore the meaning of these passages in future studies. For now, focus on the thematic flow. Watch how these judgments present a perfect mix of God's mercy and justice.

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Seal Judgments Revelation 6:1–8:5	
In <i>Revelation 5:7</i> , the slaughtered Lamb held the sealed scroll of the divine plan of redemption. Of all those in the throne room, only the Lamb proved Himself worthy to open the scroll. Because of His sacrifice, He offers to those who trust in Him salvation from Satan, sin, and death. As He unsealed the scroll, He enacted His judgment against these powers.	
First Seal <i>Revelation 6:1–2</i>	
Second Seal <i>Revelation 6:3–4</i>	
Third Seal <i>Revelation 6:5–6</i>	
Fourth Seal <i>Revelation 6:7–8</i>	
Fifth Seal <i>Revelation 6:9–11</i>	
Sixth Seal <i>Revelation 6:12–17</i>	
Seventh Seal <i>Revelation 8:1–5</i>	
Did you notice something strange occur after Jesus broke the sixth seal? Right before the completion of the judgments, John offered an interlude which sang a song of hope. Four angels held back the winds of judgment while God sealed His people for redemption. Amid this fury of justice, the redeemed praised God, saying “Salvation comes from our God” (<i>Revelation 7:10</i>).	

I have wonderful news for you. Because of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be delivered from this wrath that is to be poured out on the earth. How great is that? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Trumpet Judgments Revelation 8:6–11:19	
When the slaughtered Lamb opened the seventh seal, John noticed seven angels each carrying a trumpet (<i>Revelation 8:2</i>). This vision indicates a unique literary structure in this section of Revelation. Because these seven trumpets are nested within the seventh seal, John suggests that Jesus' execution of judgment isn't over yet. Instead, the cycle starts anew.	
First Trumpet <i>Revelation 8:6–7</i>	
Second Trumpet <i>Revelation 8:8–9</i>	
Third Trumpet <i>Revelation 8:10–11</i>	
Fourth Trumpet <i>Revelation 8:12–13</i>	
Fifth Trumpet <i>Revelation 9:1–12</i>	
Sixth Trumpet <i>Revelation 9:13–21</i>	
Seventh Trumpet <i>Revelation 11:15–19</i>	
Like the seal judgments, the trumpet judgments included an interlude of hope before the end of the cycle. In this interlude, John saw a vision of two faithful prophets who died at the hands of a wicked beast. Yet, after a little while, God raised them to life again. When the onlookers saw God's mercy in action, vindicating these righteous prophets, they gave Him glory.	

These people have been through earthquakes, plagues, and trials that we can hardly describe. Yet, even so, many of them did not repent. They did not stop their worship of demons. It's heartbreaking. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Bowl Judgments Revelation 16:1–21	
Just as the seventh seal had contained the seven trumpets, so also did the seventh trumpet contain the seven bowls (<i>Revelation 15:5–7</i>). These bowls act as visual representations of God’s wrath against evil, which each angel poured upon the earth as the final act of judgment against a world corrupted by evil.	
First Bowl <i>Revelation 16:1–2</i>	
Second Bowl <i>Revelation 16:3</i>	
Third Bowl <i>Revelation 16:4–7</i>	
Fourth Bowl <i>Revelation 16:8–9</i>	
Fifth Bowl <i>Revelation 16:10–11</i>	
Sixth Bowl <i>Revelation 16:12–16</i>	
Seventh Bowl <i>Revelation 16:17–21</i>	
Because the cycle of judgment continued after the seventh seal and seventh trumpet, John carefully inserted interludes to offer hope to those who followed Jesus. Yet he included no such interlude before the seventh bowl. This omission doesn’t suggest a loss of hope. Rather, the seventh bowl signals the <i>completion</i> of God’s judgment—the ultimate hope!	

Jesus is King above all who would call themselves king, Lord over all who would call themselves lord. The King of Kings, the Lord of Lords comes and, with one sweep of His sword, defeats His enemies. Judgment will come, but then the new heavens and the new earth will arrive. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Application: The Moral of the Story

Reading about these three sets of judgments may feel terrifying. Yet John wrote Revelation not to paralyze his readers with fear but to spur them on in hope. For this reason, John intentionally included interludes that reflected God's mercy to followers of Jesus. These judgments teach us one essential truth . . .

Because of God's mercy, those who place their trust in Jesus Christ, the slaughtered Lamb, will not experience God's wrath and justice against sin.

How does the reality of God's mercy offer you comfort and relief as you follow Jesus in an evil world doomed for judgment?

In what practical ways can you anticipate Jesus' future judgment of all things evil as you presently experience the foreshadowing of these judgments—those ever-present, ever-painful realities like natural disasters, war, pain, sickness, and death?

How does the timeless truth above inspire you to share the good news of the mercy available through Jesus Christ with those who may not yet know Him?

Because Jesus can be both just and merciful, we need not fear His fierce judgment of sin. It is only through this judgment that we will be able to experience His mercy and enjoy a renewed creation with Him forever.

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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for being both just and merciful. If You weren't just, sin would never be defeated. If You weren't merciful, I would be condemned to an eternity apart from You. I find comfort in the truth that I will be spared judgment because of Your mercy. Help me reflect that hope in everything I say and do so I can point others to You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Brad Smith, writer and content strategist, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2003, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

